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15 September 1980

CIA accusers spray-paint silly pictures

As anyone who listens to Saturday Night Live's Roseanne Roseannadanna knows, it's always something.

If it's not South Africa, then it's Iran. If it's not the FBI, then it's the CIA. This time, it's the CIA.

Last week, students may have observed the handiwork of a paranoid person on several campus buildings. Somebody learned how to operate a spray paint can, and with what took incredible skill and forethought, wrote the legend "CIA out of KU" on several campus walls. The meaning and intention behind the graffiti, however, were a little confusing.

Is the CIA engaging in operations, covert or otherwise, on the KU campus? The only dictator

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to overthrow around here already has left to work for a Topeka insurance company.

While overthrowing dictators makes for good headlines, is isn't the type of thing the CIA is doing in the Mount Oread area at this time. Well, then, what is the Chicken Little graffiti writer worried about? Maybe recruiting, for starters.

A spokesman for the agency's Denver field office said the agency now was looking for electrical engineers, computer scientists and physicists, just as Texas Instruments does. Despite a hiring freeze in certain areas, a CIA representative will be on campus Oct. 23 and 24 to give out information and to conduct interviews through the University placement office.

If it was the intention of the graffiti writer to bring this to public attention, he was wasting his paint. Not only are the CIA interviews as open as any other corporate recruiting interviews, but, like Texas Instruments, the agency has every right to come here and recruit.

So what if it is the same organization that propped up the Shah and tried to explode Castro's cigar? Believe it or not, the agency is involved in a number of other activities, and for some people, these activities could mean a rewarding career choice.

But, of course, it also is quite probable that the person who wrote the graffiti was not referring to CIA recruiting, but to CIA intelligence gathering operations. Remember, intelligence is its middle name.

When talking about intelligence, certain concessions have to be made, because in the past, and probably right now for that matter, the

CIA actively solicited information from many students and faculty members who had traveled abroad or had done research concerning foreign affairs.

In the past, this area of local CIA activity has brought cries of "spy!" down upon those who have participated. The controversy arose most recently in 1976, when members of the University community who were questioned by the CIA upon returning from trips abroad were accused of being CIA tools.

What the accusers did not seem to realize was that if the travelers did not want to give out information, they were not tortured or thrown into prison. They simply were left alone, a consideration that accusers did not seem willing to extend to those who had worked for the CIA or other intelligence agencies.

Graffiti on a Wescoe Hall wall named two KU professors and an "etc." after the standard "CIA out of KU." Roy Laird, a professor of Soviet and East European studies and one of those named, did indeed work for the CIA. From 1956-57, Laird sat at a desk in Washington, D.C., and wrote papers on the status of Soviet agriculture for the agency. Laird said he also was approached by the agency before a 1960 trip to the Soviet Union and was asked to find the answers to a list of questions they gave him. He refused, but agreed to answer any questions they might have about his trip after he returned.

"I said, 'Don't put me in the position to go looking for things,' " Laird said.

Now the agency contacts him two or three times a year, Laird said, and asks him questions about research he does as a KU professor, which he gladly answers. Interestingly enough, despite being branded as a CIA tool by some, several years ago he was called "one of the eight leading communists in the Lawrence area" by a radical fringe group.

"The Soviets described me as a 'bourgeois falsifier,'" he said. "I guess that makes me a double agent."

What it does make him is the victim of smear tactics by an artist who doesn't even have the guts to sign his work.

For people like Laird and the others named in the graffiti, whose academic specialties often require work abroad, any link with the CIA, no matter how false or innocent, would be enough for an anti-CIA fanatic in a foreign land to consider taking a pot shot. In the streets of Europe and Asia, which crawl with Iranians and other expatriates who have no great love for the CIA, this is a real possibility.

But why just write graffiti about those who work for the CIA? Other government agencies receive just as much, if not more, work from KU academicians. Perhaps the graffiti would have been more appropriate if it had read, "Department of Education out of KU."